Background
The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (Partners Program) is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s most popular and effective program for voluntary, citizen and community-based fish and wildlife habitat restoration activities. The Partners Program serves as a bridge to owners and managers of private lands to develop partnerships for the benefit of federal trust species. The approach is simple: engage willing partners, through non-regulatory incentives, to conserve, restore and protect fish and wildlife habitat on their property. The Partners Program began in 1987 to help farmers restore degraded wetlands for wildlife; today it continues to grow with opportunities to restore wetland, riverine, and upland habitats.

Partners Program in Connecticut
The Partners Program in Connecticut is administered from the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge in Westbrook, Connecticut. Since 1991, the Partners Program and Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection have worked together to protect and restore wetlands for the benefit of migratory birds and other wetland-associated wildlife. Habitat restoration in Connecticut has focused primarily on restoring degraded tidal salt marshes along the coast. Restoration activities have included removing old dredge spoil material to reestablish the original marsh elevation, replacing damaged or undersized culvert pipes, cleaning out existing ditches to reestablish tidal flow and selectively using herbicides in targeted areas to control less desirable, invasive plants such as phragmites.

Threats
Industrial, commercial and residential development have greatly impaired or eliminated coastal wetlands, especially saltmarshes in Connecticut. By the early 1900s, more than 50 percent of Connecticut’s coastal wetlands had been drained or filled for industry and development, resulting in a significant loss of habitat for many fish and wildlife species. Wetlands have been filled for construction of buildings, roads, and marinas. Saltmarshes have been ditched and drained for mosquito control and agricultural needs. Tidal streams have been gated to prevent normal tidal flows from flooding residential developments that were constructed in or near saltmarshes. Within the Connecticut Valley, many wetlands have been drained or modified for agricultural purposes.

Riparian areas have also been impacted. Streamside vegetation has been eliminated from livestock use and development. In-stream habitat of most of the large rivers has been impacted by dredging, sand and gravel mining and contaminated runoff from adjacent uplands. Hundreds of dams throughout the state obstruct migratory fish movement.

Urban development is a major threat to the health and productivity of 75 percent of the freshwater streams and rivers that feed Long Island Sound. Invasive species often follow in the wake of urban development and threaten native species.

Conservation Strategies
Saltmarsh and Freshwater Marsh Restoration and Enhancement
Coastal habitat restoration has focused on restoring degraded tidal saltmarshes through a variety of techniques including dredge spoil removal, replacement of undersized culverts to provide adequate tidal exchange, and selective herbicides to control phragmites, an invasive grass. These integrated management techniques involve the creation of interconnected, shallow water channels and pannes (small, open water areas within a saltmarsh) in the marsh to reestablish the hydrology of the marsh and provide habitat for small fish that feed on mosquito larva.

Streamside Restoration and Enhancement
Livestock fencing, streambank stabilization (using bioengineering techniques), and streambank
Restoring grasslands habitat benefits grassland dependent species like the Eastern Meadowlark.

For additional information or questions contact:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 1030
Westbrook, CT 06498
860/399 2513
860 399 2515 fax
http://www.fws.gov/northeast/mckinney/

Federal Relay Service
for the deaf and hard-of-hearing
1 800/877-8339

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1 800/344 WILD
http://www.fws.gov

September 2010